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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [OREP](#) [VT](#)  
SUBJECT: POPE MEETS SPEAKER PELOSI

REF: A. VATICAN 21  
[1](#)B. STATE 8293

CLASSIFIED BY: Julieta Noyes, CDA.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (U) The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, held a brief private meeting with the Pope on February [1](#)18. Speaker Pelosi was in Rome leading a Congressional Delegation visiting Italy and Vatican City State. Only the Speaker and Mr. Pelosi participated in the meeting, while the rest of the delegation visited Vatican sites.

[1](#)2. (SBU) In a diplomatic note and various telephone conversations with Vatican officials, the Holy See made it clear that the Pope was making an exception by agreeing to see Speaker Pelosi, as he generally meets with heads of state only. The request for an appointment for the entire delegation was transmitted to the Vatican through the Holy See's Nuncio in Washington. In response, the Vatican offered a brief private meeting only to the Speaker and "two or three others" (to be chosen by the Speaker). The Speaker opted to attend the meeting alone with her husband. The Pope was accompanied by the Chief of Protocol of the Pontifical Household and a senior officer from the Secretariat of State. Charge d'Affaires escorted the Speaker to the meeting room but waited in a hold room with the House Sergeant of Arms during the private encounter.

[1](#)3. (U) Following the encounter, the Vatican Press Office issued the following press release: Begin text:

"Following the General Audience the Holy Father briefly greeted Mrs. Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, together with her entourage.

His Holiness took the opportunity to speak of the requirements of the natural moral law and the Church's consistent teaching on the dignity of human life from conception to natural death which enjoin all Catholics, and especially legislators, jurists and those responsible for the common good of society, to work in cooperation with all men and women of good will in creating a just system of laws capable of protecting human life at all stages of its development."

End text.

[1](#)4. (U) The Office of the Speaker is issuing the following statement. Begin text:

"It is with great joy that my husband, Paul, and I met his Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI today.

In our conversation, I had the opportunity to praise the Church's leadership in fighting poverty, hunger, and global warming, as well as the Holy Father's dedication to religious freedom and his upcoming trip and message to Israel.

I was proud to show his Holiness a photograph of my family's Papal visit in the 1950s, as well as a recent picture of our

children and grandchildren."

End text.

15. (C) Comment: After the meeting, Holy See contacts told CDA they had struggled with the decision to grant the request because of the "pro-choice" views of the Speaker -- a Catholic -- and most of the other seven Members of Congress in the delegation. Ultimately, the Pope chose to grant the unusual and restricted meeting in order to deliver a message to the Speaker on bioethics. The Holy See -- and the Catholic Church in the United States and elsewhere -- emphatically opposes abortion. As far as the Vatican is concerned, this is not a political issue but a fundamental moral question which the Church is obliged to address. As the Speaker's visit demonstrates, Administration or pro-choice Congressional visitors to Rome -- especially Catholics -- should therefore anticipate stern messages from the Vatican behind closed doors on this topic. Moreover, as it demonstrated today, the Holy See may also choose to deliver such messages publicly in order to reach a wider audience.

16. (C) Nevertheless, there continue to be many issues on which the Holy See and the USG see eye-to-eye, including those raised by the Speaker in her statement, plus the defense of human rights in countries around the world and fighting trafficking in persons. Indeed, Vatican officials have told the Embassy that they believe they may find more affinities, most notably on Middle East issues, with the Obama Administration than with its predecessor. Speaker Pelosi's approach, emphasizing issues of convergence of interests in discussions with the Vatican, is the most productive way of managing more neuralgic topics.

17. (U) Post did not have the opportunity to share this message with the Congressional Delegation before its departure from Rome.

NOYES